
“THEY THAT BE TEACHERS”

BY G. L. PLUBELL

Janet, a second grader, was attending church school for the first time. She was having trouble with math and felt apprehensive about an upcoming test. Mother helped Janet study addition and subtraction, hoping desperately that her little girl would do well enough to build a little self-confidence.

After the test, Janet came home from school with a sparkle in her eyes and happily reported, “Mother, when I took the test the teacher came and stood by me...and, Mother, my teacher patted me on the head and said, ‘That’s good!’”

Janet’s grandmother worked in our office. As she related the incident she said, “To Janet it didn’t matter whether the sums were right or wrong. What mattered most was that a caring teacher was perceptive enough to understand a little girl’s need, who came and stood by her, and, patting her on the head, said, ‘That’s good!’”

Honoring Adventist Teachers

In 1989-1990 we are honoring Adventist teachers who by their very presence make others feel important, alive, capable of becoming better than they had ever hoped. Children need praise and appreciation in order to grow. What a blessing are those magnificent teachers who invite and encourage this growth in others! They possess a special talent for helping others blossom forth and develop their full potential.

Such teachers seem to have the ability to melt the inhibition in others just as the sun banishes the frost. Wariness, distrust, skepticism, and feelings of inadequacy all fade in the presence of these gifted teachers.

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Unfortunately, not every teacher helps others grow. For whatever reason—stress, burnout, problems at home, or withering spiritual relationships—these teachers seem to have a talent for cutting children down. They make their students feel inadequate and useless, causing them to give up, hold back, and stop trying. Such teachers seem to be experts in finding the weaknesses of others instead of building their strengths.

How tragic! As educators it is our privilege to reach out to the children and youth—to create positive reactions, to invite them to grow.

Recognizing Human Potential

The Master Teacher, our example, saw in people what they could become. When Jesus looked at people He did not see their clothes, their social status, or their sins. Rather, He saw their tattered, yearning hearts. He saw their potential. He saw them as candidates for immortal honors. Christian educators need the same Christlike capacity to see children and youth in terms of what they might become.

It is interesting to note how much information in professional literature on the influence of teachers substantiates the inspired Word.

Potter boldly declared:

The influence of the teacher begins the first hour of the first day of school, and it

continues unflinching. In the formative years, the tendency to emulate is strong; the powers of the teacher to mold is great. Indeed, the very pattern of our life is many times set by the examples and influence of our teachers.¹

Baughman, after reviewing studies on the teacher and the climate of the classroom pointed out that “certain very important points can be drawn:

“1. The teacher is the center or focal point in any and every classroom.

“2. Social climate and mental health are influenced by the teacher’s personality and attitude.”²

The Moral Dimensions of Education

As Christian teachers we know that these influences also affect the spiritual dimension of education. Indeed, even secular educators recognize the moral dimensions of education. Silverman says, “The teaching profession offers a great opportunity for influencing lives of hundreds of people and of guiding them not only to earn a living, but to live a good life.”³

Saltzberg, from her studies and research, stated, “No matter what the subject taught, the teacher teaches his true self, even when he has no awareness that he is so doing.” She added that whether or not they are aware of it, teachers impart to their pupils their own values of honesty, sincerity, and diligence—or lack of these qualities.⁴

Christian education consists of many things. It is more than the use of Christ-centered curricula, reading of the Bible, and worship. It must evolve around teachers whose focal point is a personal relationship with Christ.

Pearson, while contemplating the many intangibles of the teaching process, made this thoughtful observation:

They are emanations of the spirit that

can neither be weighed nor measured. Their gentle impact upon the spirit of the child begets a reaction of the spirit and the teaching process is underway. Something is happening in the spirit of the child because something has happened in the spirit of the teacher.⁵

Knowledge and Character

That is certainly reminiscent of Ellen White's statement:

Knowledge harmoniously blended with a Christlike character will make a person truly a light to the world.... Education balanced by a solid religious experience, fits the teacher to do his appointed work steadily, firmly, understandingly.⁶

Stanford and Parker certainly agreed with this concept of the teacher's work when they wrote that

The old saying that "all that is learned in school is forgotten, but the education remains" represents a much wiser conception of the essence of education than viewing it as solely the acquisition of information.⁷

The marginal reading of Daniel 12:3 declares: "and they that be 'teachers' shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever." What an incentive for Christian teachers to magnify their mission and service!

"Teachers, what opportunities are

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yours! What a privilege is within your reach of molding the minds and characters of the youth under your charge!"⁸

Teachers who are faithful to this task are promised that they will shine with unusual brilliance, as blazing stars, not temporarily, but permanently, in the kingdom of glory.

The most brilliant and permanent of God's created works, the blazing suns, are the objects to which God likens dedicated Christian teachers. Throughout time and eternity they will shine with a glory and splendor that will never dim or be eclipsed.

During the 1989-1990 school year we honor and pay tribute to the true stars—those teachers who not only impart knowledge, but who also turn

young hearts and minds to righteousness. In the North American Division there are approximately 5,200 teacher-evangelists at the K-12 level and another 1,700 at the college and university level. A total of 6,900 models of excellence. What firmament can claim so many blazing stars to bring the light of God's presence to this generation of Adventist children and youth? □

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